

# URBAN FALLOWS

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*architecture as a catalyst  
for regeneration of  
marginalised urban land*



Verdant heart of city, whispers soft,  
Each nook and corner, life aloft.  
Nature's touch in urban grace,  
Time reveals a fallow's trace.

Silent streets, where shadows play,  
In corners, dreams and echoes sway.  
Solace found, in nature's charm,  
Lies the fallow, calm, disarmed.

Amidst the ruins, colors bloom,  
Venturing forth, their place resume.  
Kindly winds, leaves' gentle sway,  
A world reborn, where nature stays.

Reaching high, the tendrils climb,  
Transforming gray, a vibrant rhyme.  
Softly, as the seasons turn,  
Every inch of fallow yearns.

Life and beauty intertwine,  
In this urban space, divine.  
Nature's heart in city beats,  
A fallow's tale, where life completes.



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*“Something we can’t see, or don’t see, or our brain doesn’t let us see,  
because we think that it’s somebody else’s problem”*

*Douglas Adams, Life, the Universe and Everything*



# Abstract

In the face of rapid urbanisation, population growth, and environmental degradation, there is an urgent need to rethink the design and construction of urban spaces. The thesis investigates the potential of architecture as a catalyst for the regeneration of the area surrounding the Abbey Mills Pumping Station in London, UK. The process is symbolically viewed through the lens of cyclical agricultural fallowing as a method of urban renewal. This perspective positively interprets the dormant state of the site, perceiving the temporary cessation of capitalistic activities as an opportunity for other ecosystems to thrive. Drawing from cultural landscape theory and incorporating the idea of architecture as an accelerator in urban ecosystems, the thesis culminates with the notion of "the incomplete". It suggests a framework for progressive change and eventual occupation of the post-industrial site over time. Employing a mixed-methods approach, this research aims to uncover the potential and challenges of urban transformation as part of a more socially and environmentally conscious architectural practice.

**Keyword:** transformation, fallow, palimpsest, scarcity, diversity

# Introduction:

## A story about industry, resources and the future

*“He looked at the granite. To be cut, he thought, and made into walls. He looked at a tree. To be split and made into rafters. He looked at a streak of rust on the stone and thought of iron ore under the ground; to be melted and to emerge as girders against the sky. These rocks, he thought, are here for me; waiting for the drill, the dynamite and my voice; waiting to be split, ripped, pounded, reborn; waiting for the shape my hands will give them.”*

*Ayn Rand, The Fountainhead, 3*

When, 2000 years ago, Marcus Vitruvius Pollio wrote in his treatise on architecture that *firmitas*, *utilitas*, and *venustas*<sup>1</sup> should be the guiding principles for every new project, he could not foresee the complexity of changes that the world would go through. As a result, numerous prominent architects and theoreticians expanded and re-narrated the Vitruvian equilibrium throughout the centuries by providing new sets of paradigms. Political, social, and economic ideals of the time dictated each new iteration's direction and conditioned the architectural culture's natural evolution.<sup>2</sup> Today, as we face the urgent need for a more sustainable and equitable development model, it becomes clear that the traditional principles must be again re-narrated, highlighting the ongoing shortages, vulnerabilities, and environmental degradation. Based on a collaboration between governments, businesses, civil organisations, and individuals, the architect has the opportunity to acquire a vital role in the disruption of the current system. Beginning with the operating mechanisms of our urban territories, spiraling towards the

planetary scale. However, to create a new set of dependencies<sup>3</sup> for architecture and urban planning that address the pressing issues of resilience and equity, we must first acknowledge the root cause of these problems, and understand how yesterday's decisions have become the basis for the problems and opportunities of tomorrow.

Going back in time leads us to the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, when extraction technologies, logistic chains, mass production, and territorial modifications began dominating human growth. Since then, primarily predicated on the unsustainably long trajectory of limitless development, the global industrial and financial model has pushed human societies to the verge of several pressing concerns and uncertainties. On the one hand, the depletion of metals, sediment, and fossil fuels and the inequitable distribution of natural resources such as timber, water, and food have caused significant social and economic inequalities while also exacerbating environmental degradation and climate change.

1. [lat. *firmitas*, *utilitas*, *venustas*] "strength", "utility", and "beauty"; Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture*.

2. Architectural culture refers to the values, attitudes, and beliefs that shape the practice of architecture and the built environment. It encompasses the history, theory, and criticism of architecture, as well as the social and cultural context in which architecture is produced. Architectural culture is shaped by a variety of factors, such as technological advancements, social and political changes, economic forces, and artistic movements. In broader terms, architectural culture can be seen as part of a larger cultural discourse that reflects the values and aspirations of a society. It influences the way people perceive and experience the built environment, and it plays a role in shaping our understanding of aesthetics, function, and form.

3. In *Architecture Depends* (MIT Press, 2009), Jeremy Till disusses more thoroughly about the importance to open up the architectural practice to its manifold dependencies.

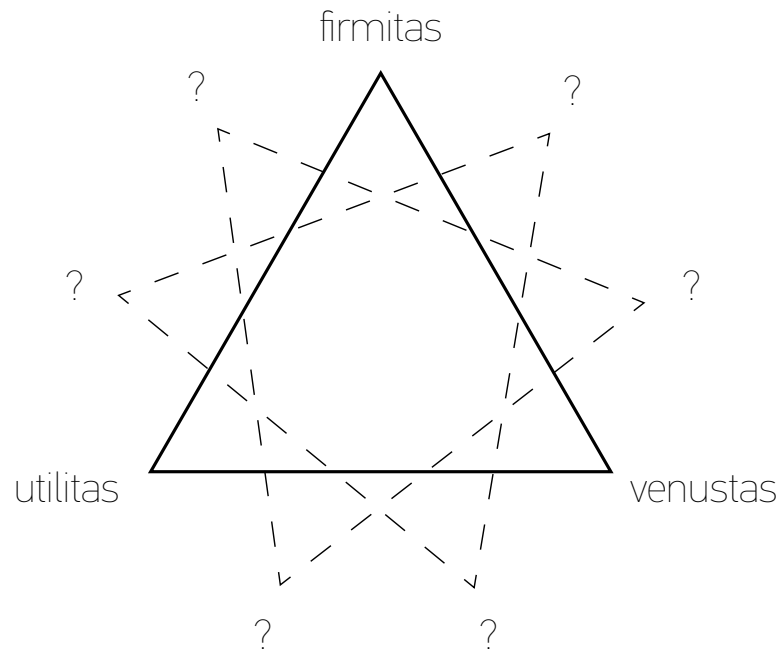


fig.1 Post-Vitruvian dependencies

And it was not only resources that we rationalised and seen as tools for capital acumualtion. The rationalisation of space under capitalism is one facet of the ideology of progress which has had a profound impact on the spatial organisation of society in nature

The incongruity, however, isn't just a question of an anxious space of late modernity. The instrumentalisation of space is already apparent in the mid-19th century, when Ildefons Cerdà's opening statement for urbanisation sought to 'fill the earth'. And by the early 20th century, this programmatic vision for design was fully institutionalised when Ebenezer Howard's seminal Garden Cities project 'sought to maximise functionality through territory saturated with activity'. urbanisation is a physical manifestation of the drive to produce a 'rational landscape' in which barriers to the turnover time of capital accumulation are removed. In this sense then, letting space outside of the linear economy introduced unacceptable friction into the capitalist system. It was the capitalist project to proletarianise the population that transformed social relations connected more with ecological rhythms into the realm of the abstract rhythms of capitalism.

With the advent of the 20th century, the exploitative approach towards the land has been maintained, repeated, and perfected. It was a time when technological advancements and economic growth took precedence over environmental concerns and the individual voice. Cities expanded rapidly, accommodating growing populations and industries, causing an unprecedented surge of the human footprint on global resources and aggravating the

processes that began at the advent of industrialisation.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, as the century progressed, the warning signs of the damage inflicted by this unchecked expansion started to appear, prompting a reevaluation of the status quo. In the postwar period, the 1960s and 1970s marked an awakening of social awareness, and the emergence of the environmental movement. Influential figures like Rachel Carson, Aurelio Peccei, and Stewart Brand<sup>5</sup> brought attention to the ecological and societal consequences of the misalignment between the desire for unlimited growth and the limited resource capacity. However, the shift towards neoliberal ideology in the 1980s, with its emphasis on free-market capitalism, deregulation, and privatisation, reversed the trend and only exacerbated this problem. The pursuit of short-term profits and individualism led to a disregard for the long-term consequences of our actions. This has resulted in environmental degradation, social inequality, and economic instability.<sup>6</sup>

Nowadays, extraction, pollution, and consumption processes are part of a global network, affecting the landscapes, populations, economies, and ecologies of entire regions. Viewing the planet as a kind of perpetual growth machine with a core purpose of chasing profits, an ever-growing metabolism, is churning the earth in successive waves of creative destruction. This results in both acute and chronic pathologies of devalued human social relations, diminished diversity of the biosphere and a continually transformed urban fabric at ever larger scales. What impact has the growth imperative had on the design professions. The current building methods almost exclusively base their construction decisions and methods on

4. Rem Koolhaas and Masao Miyoshi, "XL in Asia: A Dialogue between Rem Koolhaas and Masao Miyoshi," *Boundary 2* 24, no. 2 (1997): 1, <https://doi.org/10.2307/303761>. 4

5. Rachel Carson, "Silent Spring" 1962; In the fall of 1968, the first edition of the "Whole Earth Catalog" was published: a compendium of product listings, how-to diagrams, and educational ephemera intended for communards and other participants in the back-to-the-land movement. The beginning of the next decade was marked by the book *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind*, which was commissioned by Aurelio Peccei in 1972.

6. Vicente Navarro, "Neoliberalism, 'Globalization,' Unemployment, Inequalities, and the Welfare State," *International Journal of Health Services* 28, no. 4 (October 1998): 607–82, <https://doi.org/10.2190/y3x7-rg7e-6626-fvpt>.

the constraints imposed by the site of assembly. This lack of consideration for the broader impacts of building processes has significant implications for sustainability and social justice, perpetuating the imbalance between Global South/Global North, urban/rural, and human/non-human. On an European scale, big cities such as London, Paris, and Istanbul face significant infrastructural, environmental, and social challenges with their high population density and fast-paced development. Therefore, the administrative bodies face growing pressure to rethink how urban spaces are designed and built. Despite the growing awareness of the importance of sustainable construction, there still needs to be more significant investment in research and development of how to exit from the vicious cycle of fast-paced and destructive development.

To meet this challenge, it is necessary to adopt an approach beyond simply reducing carbon emissions and energy usage, but such that navigates a shift towards a more land- and resource-conscious approach. One promising strategy is to reevaluate locally available material resources, infrastructure, land, and social potential. In the context of the contemporary city, vacant land in urban cores and semi-periphery hold great potential to become a driving force for more socially inclusive and environmentally resilient cities. Although individual vacant land parcels are typically temporal, vacant land as a land-use category is a constant characteristic of modern cities. Additionally, the proportion of vacant land remains relatively stable across cities, despite regional differences, and is present in both expanding and contracting urban areas. However, the prevailing mindset of developmentalism and the emphasis on traditional urban landscapes have resulted in a widespread misunderstanding of the

issue of vacant land. Addressing this problem necessitates a shift in urban standards and practices, embracing the in-situ conditions of freedom, heterogeneity and disorder as valuable for future urban redevelopments.

Therefore, to stitch those spaces back into the broader productive ecosystem, the vacant urban locations should be regarded as experiencing a temporary pause or break, rather than complete abandonment or disuse. The agricultural concept of fallow became a potential perspective through which the negative connotations could be viewed as an opportunity, relying on notions of shifts and impulses in urban metabolism. This concept addresses ecological and environmental issues by allowing for a post-anthropocentric approach to regeneration and transformation. When applied to the urban context, it also aims to maintain and improve cultural conditions, re-establishing the equilibrium of inhabitation between the fallow site and its broader community. Instead of taming the ambiguous for sole economic purposes, architecture is seen as a curatorial framework in this scenario, incorporating a more comprehensive set of dependencies. By adopting a more holistic and gradual approach, architects can integrate the interconnections between various aspects of urban life and design solutions, becoming the catalyser of those marginalised urban lands. Thus, by questioning how design tools can become capable of addressing the existing networks of actors, programs, and systems in a healthy and non-destructive manner, this research mitigates between boundaries of ambiguity, time and space. Additionally, the purpose of the study is to recognise the new architectural practitioner as a curator of evolutionary processes, rather than revolutionary such.

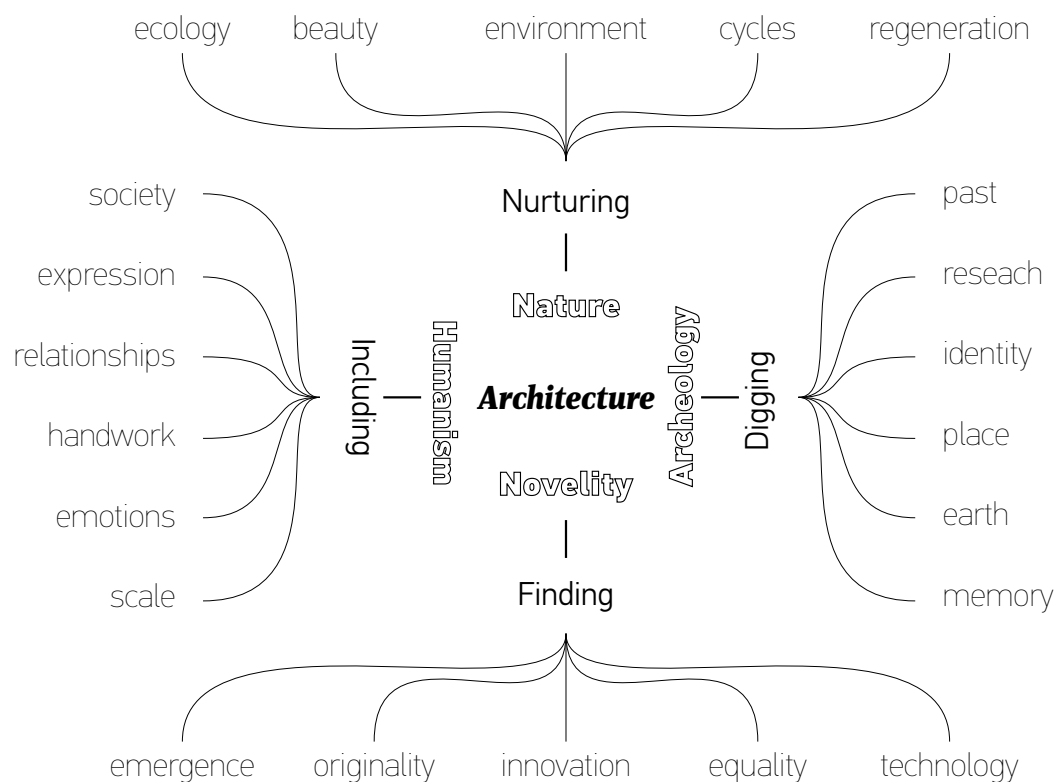


fig.2 Architecture as a holistic discipline

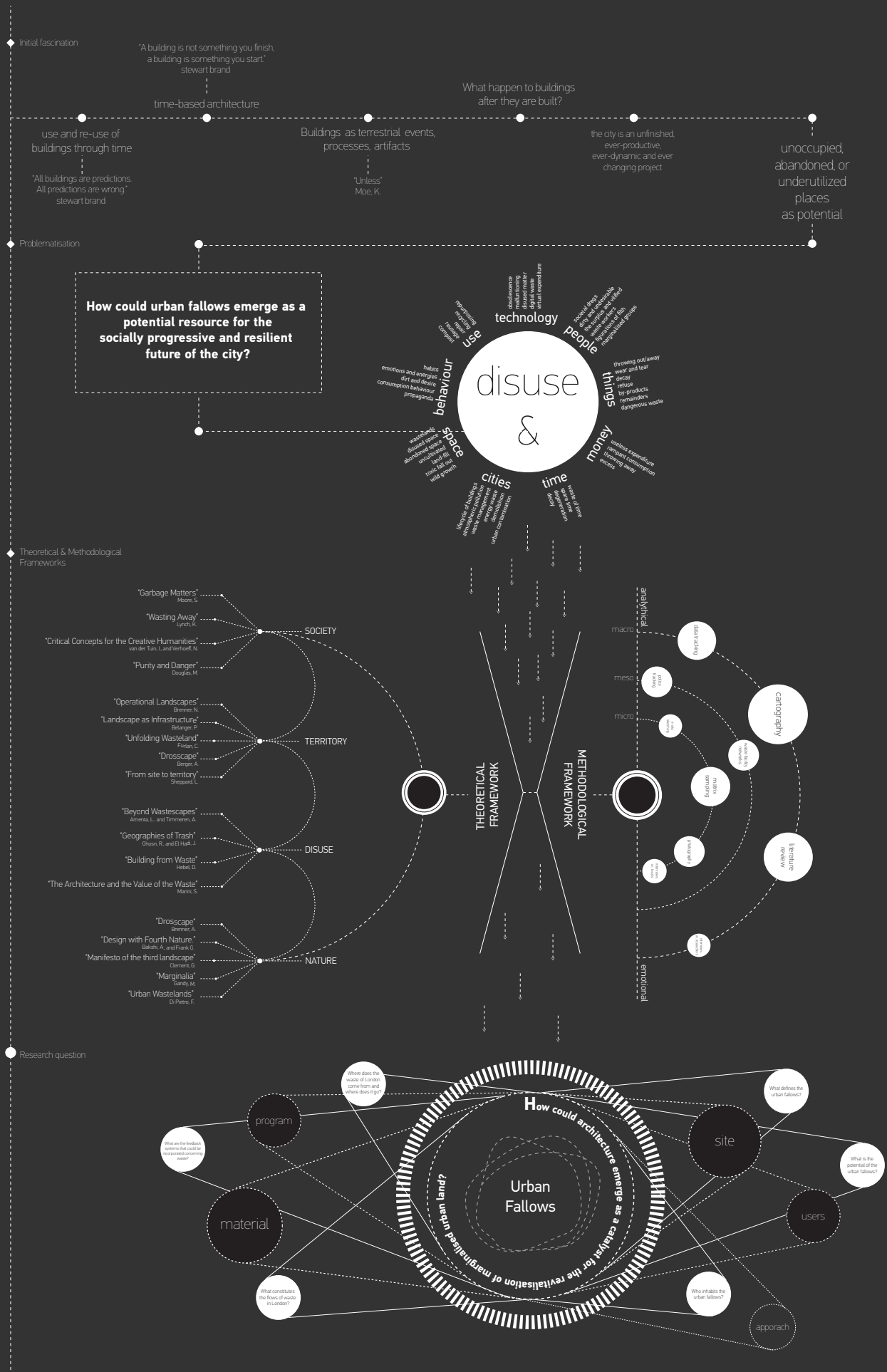


fig.3 Research plan diagram

# The urban antithesis: A pathway to a socially progressive and resilient future for cities

*“Urban wastelands unsettle the familiar terrain of cultural landscapes, designed spaces, and the organizational logic of modernity.”*

*Matthew Gandy, Marginalia, 1311*

Throughout the extensive research, the main objective has been to expand upon the traditional understanding of wastelands, and later on urban fallows,<sup>7</sup> incorporating various dimensions of its urban contextualisation and exploring its potential for regeneration. By bridging the gap between various scales, complexities, and disciplinary approaches, this study has endeavoured to address those spaces' dynamic and multifaceted nature, enabling a more comprehensive and contextual understanding of the intricate relationships and opportunities that urban fallows present. Additionally, it highlights the challenges associated with their transformation and the role that architecture could play in the time dependent processes.

The fluidity and ambiguity of the vacant land in terms of its size, location, and constituent parts have resulted in a variety of terminology concerning it, such as “urban voids”, “wastelands”, “terrain vague”, “edgelands”, “in-

terim spaces”, and many more.<sup>8</sup> These concepts share the theme of underused or unproductive spaces in cities, but each has unique characteristics and implications. Wastelands, for example, were carefully defined and mapped as sterile areas, sandy sites, or woodland with wild vegetation and stones not adapted to plantations.<sup>9</sup> After the industrial revolution, the concept of wastelands drastically changed. From culture's antithesis, they become a product of the unsustainable linear growth processes and their spatial consequences within the context of the urban metabolic flows and the related infrastructure.<sup>10</sup> Terrain vague, most notably related to the text by Ignasi de Sola-Morales, is seen as “strange places that exist outside the city's effective circuits and productive structures... (those are) places are where the city is no longer... interior islands void of activity, oversights, these areas are simply uninhabited, unsafe, and unproductive.”<sup>11</sup> The urban voids, following the description by Sergio Lopez-Pineiro, constitute gaps within the urban

7. The term fallow originates from Old English fealh, related to the idea of a land that is plowed but not planted. Hence, a fallow period signifies a state, condition, or concept in which something remains unexploited or dormant. To lie fallow entails not just being left unseeded, but also being undeveloped, inactive, and possessing latent utility, while not yet being utilized or engaged. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/fallow>

8. Sergio Lopez-Pineiro, A Glossary of Urban Voids (Jovis Verlag, 2020).

9. Cecilia Furlan and Bruno De Meulder, “Leftover as a Resource. A Systemic Design Approach to Re-Cycle a Diffuse Territory,” unknown, May 15, 2014, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/290195381\\_Leftover\\_as\\_a\\_resource\\_A\\_systemic\\_design\\_approach\\_to\\_re-cycle\\_a\\_diffuse\\_territory](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/290195381_Leftover_as_a_resource_A_systemic_design_approach_to_re-cycle_a_diffuse_territory). 3

10. Libera Amenta and Arjan van Timmeren, “Beyond Wastescapes: Towards Circular Landscapes. Addressing the Spatial Dimension of Circularity through the Regeneration of Wastescapes,” Sustainability 10, no. 12 (December 12, 2018): 4740, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10124740>. 1





fig.4 Urban fallows

continuum of programme, capital, expectations, and obligations. They occur accidentally or intentionally outside this smooth continuum of space organisation, power representation, and infrastructure, exclusive of any functional need. Within the city, urban voids are separated from their surroundings, creating a space of seclusion outside of cultural norms and rules.

Those slight alterations in the definition of the matter present the richness of the topic submerged in complexity, heterogeneity, and stratification. Nevertheless, each of those terms dictates a different projection towards the land. Therefore, the decision to concentrate on fallow land instead of other urban vacancy terms has been informed by the greater relevance of climate emergency and its relation to the notions of reevaluation, regeneration, and holistic thinking.

Fallow land, conventionally understood as uncultivated or unused land left for a while to regain its fertility, has a parallel manifestation in the urban context, wherein it refers to underused or derelict spaces with the potential to be repurposed or redeveloped. From disused buildings and production facilities through former quarries to areas with contaminated air, water, and soil, they appear as voids in the contemporary fabric. They represent the imperfection of the complex system of flows of energy, water, air, materials, money, and food that perpetuate in the territory.

Additionally, due to the pulsating urban metabolism, people emerge with blur identities, juxtaposing culture and nature, town and country, domesticated and wild. Omnipresent, heterogeneous, and layered, they appear as a land category united not by consistent physical qualities but by their absence. Bearing that in mind, in the context of the urban landscape, fallow time can be interpreted as a conscious decision to allow an urban space to enter a period of temporary dormancy or suspension. This hiatus may shift the local balances, making the prior patterns of inhabitation and associated artefacts no longer viable or sustainable. Simultaneously, that same hibernation maintains the potential for utility and productivity. By providing an opportunity for reevaluation, adaptation, and regeneration, fallow time can contribute to the evolution and transformation of urban spaces dynamically and responsively. To encapsulate, I suggest a provisional definition of the urban following as a purposeful interval during which gradual endeavours are undertaken to recalibrate the occupation patterns of the fallow location and its encompassing community, ultimately fostering greater harmony and collective welfare within the region.

As a matrix between tangible and intangible, fallow land provides pause time for reflection. On the one hand, the notion of fallowing implies intent.<sup>12</sup> They could represent a transformation, part of the rebellion of intransigence against the featureless, exclusive, and overly-pro-

11. Ignasi de Solà-Morales, "Terrain Vague," in *Anyplace*, ed. Cynthia C. Davidson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 118-123

12. Giller, Ken E., Jens A. Andersson, Marc Corbeels, John A. Kirkegaard, David A. Mortensen, Olaf Erenstein and Bernard Vanlauwe. "Beyond conservation agriculture." *Frontiers in Plant Science* 6 (2015).

14. Matthew Gandy, "Marginalia: Aesthetics, Ecology, and Urban Wastelands," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 103, no. 6 (November 2013):1301-16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00045608.2013.832105>. 1302

15. Ghandy, Marginalia, 1310

16. Di Pietro, Rachele, and Laura Lieto. "Urban voids as potential resources: The case of Naples." In *Urban Voids*, pp. 45-58. Springer, Cham, 2021.

grammed cityscape. Therefore, we need new envisions of rituals and technology that could develop an alternative economic and social model for production and consumption, avoiding natural resource depletion and focusing on processes of cycles and reflows. This intentional choice allows for natural recovery and rejuvenation, emphasising the importance of strategic planning and foresight in managing resources. Additionally, fallow land is related to time cycles and pays special attention to the relationships between the different rhythms within the complex system. In this context, fallow time, which might reflect a moment of resource, energy, interest, or potential depletion, could be a time for reflection and recovery. On the other hand, positioning the fallows as territories on the margins of the economy, of the city, of what is proper suddenly reveals a potential for a new type of urbanity. The spaces seen as “useless” might nonetheless be spaces of adventure, imagination, and self-discovery for artists, children, filmmakers, and other explorers of the urban realm.<sup>14</sup> As a glitch in the matrix, their imprecise and uncontrolled character allows for a more inclusive and unorthodox approach. Providing refuge to people, plants, animals, and architecture exiled from the capitalist paradigm, fallows represent a new wildness concentrated in areas where the formal components of the created environment are often inaccessible. Above all, fallows appear as “islands” in cultural, material, and political aspects that defy the utilitarian thrust of capitalist urbanisation ideologically and practically.<sup>15</sup>

As urban landscapes evolve, it is essential to consider the integration of natural elements within their fabric. In this light, urban fallows can be complementary to

the green-blue infrastructure, functioning as alternative ecological models that contribute to integrating nature in contemporary cities.<sup>16</sup> As “Third Landscapes” or “Fourth Nature,” urban fallows represent neglected areas that, despite their unmanaged state, have high harbour rates of flora and fauna diversity due to the presence of pioneer species.<sup>17</sup> These spaces play a critical role in fostering biodiversity and enhancing ecological connectivity across various scales, from the microscopic to the global level.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, urban fallows can be sites where ecology and design intersect, as exemplified by projects such as Duisburg-Nord Landscape Park or Schöneberger Südgelände Park in Berlin.<sup>19</sup> In these cases, nature is employed to address architectural nostalgia and abandonment while creating spaces for human use that celebrate novel vegetative communities. The unpredictable and surprising character of urban fallows allows for unique experiences that blend biophysical resources, socio-technological services, and exchange spaces within the urban fabric.<sup>20</sup>

However, integrating urban fallows into the urban context often requires significant scientific, political, and public support, as they are not merely natural features but “synthetic” manifestations of human-modified spaces.<sup>21</sup> By acknowledging urban fallows as a resource rather than a hindrance, planners, designers, and policymakers can embrace their multifaceted nature, addressing the challenges and harnessing the opportunities they present. Ultimately, a renewed understanding of urban fallows can contribute to more resilient, equitable, and sustainable cities, where diverse human and non-human actors coexist and thrive within a dynamic and interconnected urban ecosystem.

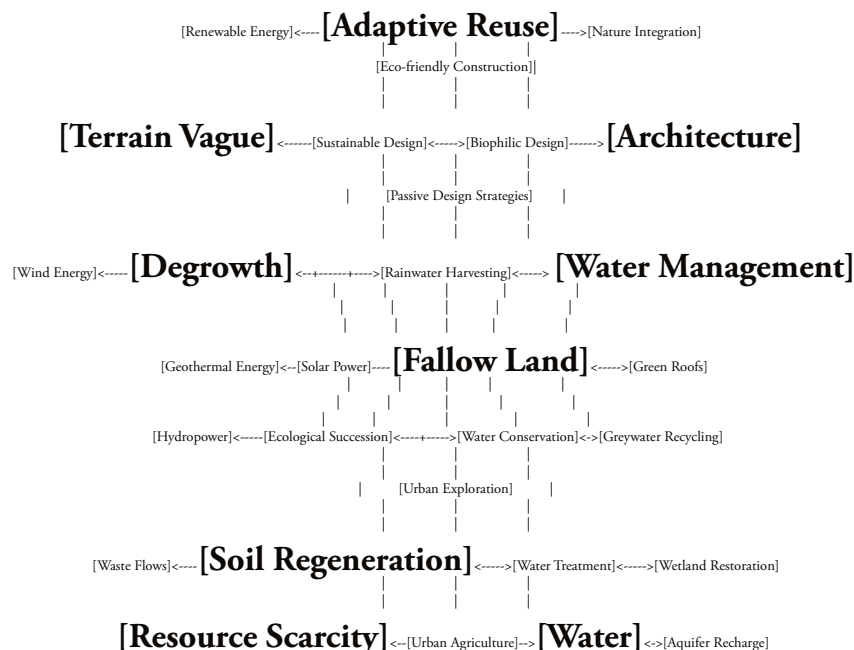


fig.5 The non-hierarchical path towards regenerative design

17. Gilles Clément, *Manifest Der Dritten Landschaft* (Merve Verlag Berlin, 2010).5

18. Clément, *Dritten Landschaft*. 22

19. Bakshi, Anjali, and Colleen Gallagher. "Fourth nature: Ecology and design in the post-industrial landscape." *Harvard Design Magazine* 45 (2017): 170-181.

20. Kowarik, Ingo. "Translating nature's otherness: The productive potential of urban fallows." In *Urban Wilderness*, pp. 25-33. Jovis, 2009.

21. Kabisch, Nadja, et al. "Nature-based solutions to climate change mitigation and adaptation in urban areas: Perspectives on indicators, knowledge gaps, barriers, and opportunities for action." *Ecology and Society* 21, no. 2 (2016).

# URBAN FALLOW

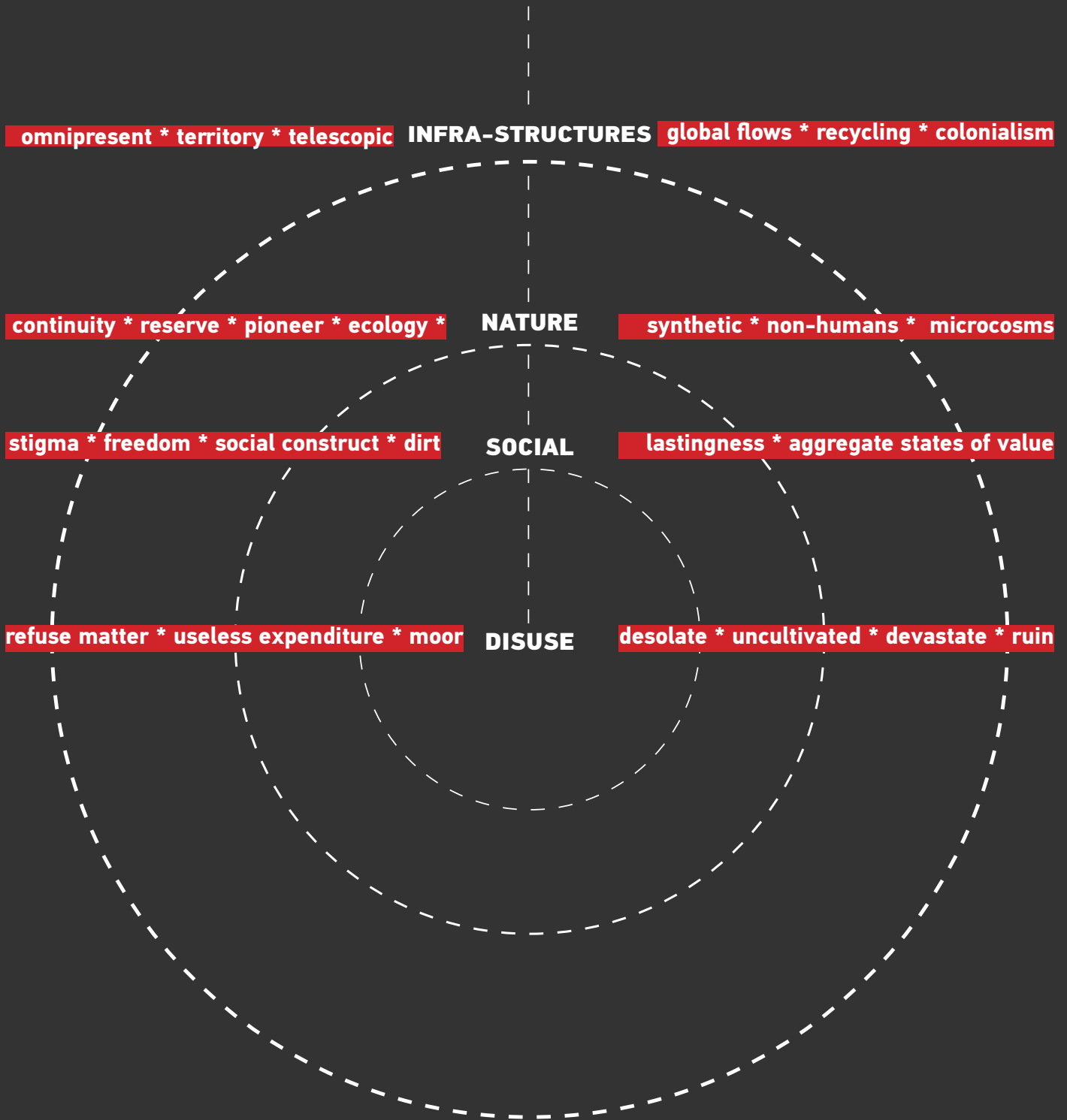


fig.6 Urban fallows as cross-scalar phenomena

# The case of London: Tracing the scars of industrialisation

*"The city, as a human artifact, should be considered a structure that is continuously changing, and the city's past is the primary guide to understanding its present structure."*

*Aldo Rossi, The Architecture of the City*

When discussing the urban and its perpetual edification, we must take into consideration that construction is not a neutral act. Each new structure erected and each advance in building technology comes with a cost to the environment. Natural resources are consumed, habitats are disrupted, and ecosystems are strained. As we continue constructing our cities and infrastructure, we must acknowledge the truth within the statement mentioned above and work to minimise the destruction resulting from our endeavours. In this regard, the relationship between architecture and the concept of land fallowing reveals a unique opportunity for mitigating the environmental consequences of urban development. By integrating land fallowing principles with sustainable architectural practices, we can significantly reduce the ecological impact of our cities and foster more resilient urban environments. As we consider the possibilities for a more sustainable approach to architecture and building culture, it is essential to exam-

ine real-world examples where these ideas can be applied.

One prominent case is the metropolitan area of London, UK. Once the world's industrial capital, London aspires to be a sustainable growth model with a new approach to globalism, resilience, and urban well-being. Nevertheless, the city still heavily relies on its global hinterland for the material flow in and out.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, it becomes vital to reverse, reconnect, shift, and dismantle particular channels in the urban fabric to set the trajectory towards a more sustainable future. To address these issues, the study employs a mixed-methods approach, including qualitative and quantitative research methods. Tools such as literature reviews, case studies, interviews, and different types of analytical mapping have been used to achieve an objective and broad-reaching perspective on the researched topics. This multifaceted approach has provided a comprehensive understanding of the potential and challenges of

22. Sassen, Saskia. "The Global City: Introducing a Concept." *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 11, no. 2 (2005): 27–43. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24590544>.





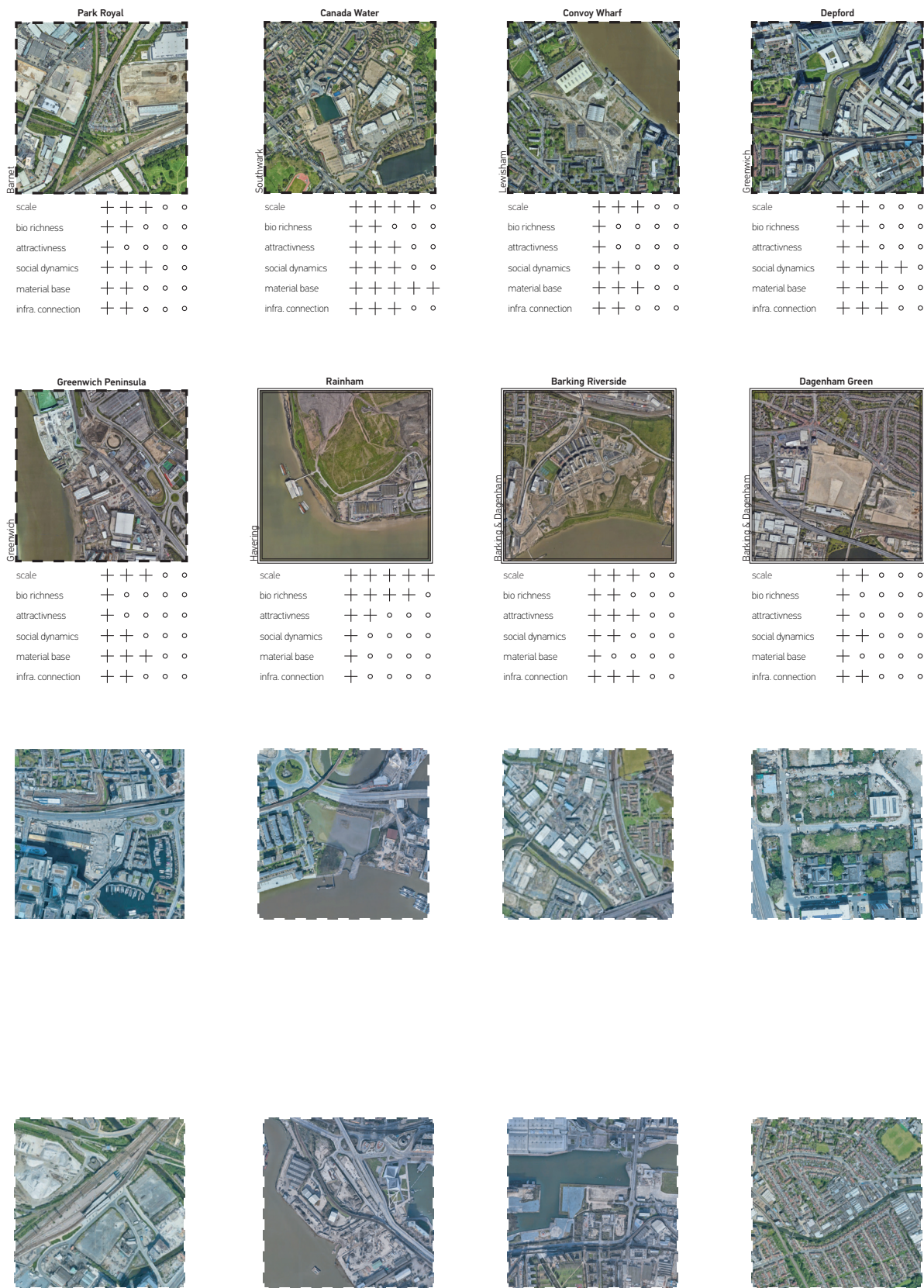


fig.10



The findings from these multi-layered analyses revealed that urban fallow land in London is not uniformly distributed and is influenced by a complex interplay of spatial, temporal, and socio-economic factors. Some areas exhibited a higher propensity for urban fallows due to historical land use patterns, while others were more susceptible due to contemporary socio-economic conditions. The insights gained from this comprehensive evaluation enabled us to propose targeted interventions to address the issue of urban fallows in London, ranging from policy changes and financial incentives to community-led regeneration projects and urban design strategies.

Nevertheless, understanding that the existing database only provides an ephemeral snapshot of reality, the meso analysis of the data was primarily focused on the areas included in the city's future ambitions. Aligning the research with the plans of the local administration, on the one hand, allows clarification of the GLA ambitions. However, more importantly, by doing that, the project could reveal itself as a constructive critique towards the potential flaws of the development agenda.

The next phase of the study involved conducting in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, such as urban planners, policymakers, architects, and community representatives, gathering their perspectives on urban voids and the potential for their transformation. These interviews offered valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with repurposing urban fallows and the attitudes and beliefs of those responsible for implementing change.

Additionally, photo documentations served as a visual archive of my explorations, capturing the essence of urban fallows and providing a rich source of inspiration for design concepts and strategies. These images offered a tangible representation of the realities faced by these neglected spaces, revealing the textures, colors, and patterns that define their character.

Finally, the use of analogue tools, such as sketches, models, and physical prototypes, enabled me to experiment with different design solutions and to communicate my ideas more effectively. These tactile methods fostered a deeper engagement with the materiality and spatial qualities of urban fallows, allowing me to envision their transformation in a more tangible and experiential manner.

The research has helped me conclude that these urbanised landscapes appear as diffuse, disordered structures comprising various urban features. They are agglomerations of urban nodal points and do not necessarily have any clear centre, consisting instead of foci in an extensive network, functionally diverse and of varying density. Each unit has its own logic, overlaid like a palimpsest on previously obliterated land uses. It contributes to the cacophony of different forms of use, appearances and topography, often without any mutual connection or visual significance. Developing at high speed, these fragmented urban landscapes change under the influence of powerfully dynamic mechanisms of change, which may lead to local 'order' but, at a basic level, make it impossible for the planner to observe cohesive principles of order through form,



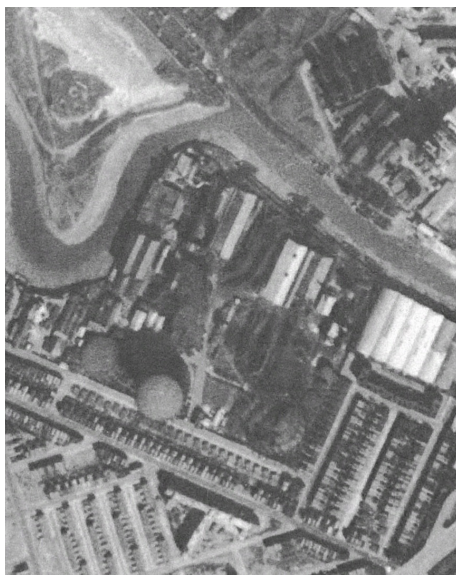
fig.11 The Fallows of London



delineation and aesthetics. Thereby, the aforementioned principles of the urban fallow reveal themselves as a highly acceptable tactic.

After the thorough analysis in the case of London, one particular system stood out as the cross-boundary between various flows, actors and influences. Stretching along the River Lea and its branches, the Lea Valley, marked by a notable Industrial past, entangled with green-blue infrastructures, have become a fragmented matter on a territorial level. The characteristics of the urban archipelago, following Mary Casper's thought,<sup>23</sup> is constructed on the interconnectedness of the separate nodes, highlighting the limitation of binary thinking. Therefore, thinking about a more fluid relationship between the fragments and the whole could re-narrate a more complex, inclusive and mutually beneficial system of dependencies. By contesting conventional urban planning paradigms, the confluence of architectural mechanisms intertwined with landscape and urbanism tactics allows for a novel approach emphasising thickness, porosity, and depth. Distributed along the stra-

tegic archipelago, these innovative interventions challenge the traditional edge, augmenting their capacity as spatial interfaces. Consequently, this fusion transcends the immediate urban context, influencing a broader territorial scale. In the context of the post-anthropocentric future and the fallow land overcoming the division of space into soft and hard, voids and fills, nothingness and somethingness, it emphasises the importance of understanding the complexity and diversity of urban spaces and their interconnections with the natural environment. The cross-pollination existing on the touching points between those coexisting realities also suggests that the land, especially the historically heavy land, presents a moment when past, present, and future unfold simultaneously, blurring even more an ideal condition. Coming out of this statement, I advocate for a new reading and editing of the urban setting based on gradient, layers and time rather than strict delineations and fixed boundaries.



1944



2002



2014



2018



2020



2023

fig.12 The urban land as an ever-changing territory



Furthering down with my site investigation, my attention was caught by the Lower part of the Lea Valley, which has been undergoing an unprecedented urban transformation due to the significant redevelopment and regeneration projects triggered by the 2012 Olympic Games. This formerly derelict yet characterful industrial area on the fringes of East London is now the epicentre of future investments and urban renewal. A significant amount of new housing, infrastructure, open spaces, and restored natural habitats are rapidly and thoroughly reshaping the face and spirit of this diverse and complex part of East London. However, despite the Games, the Lower Lea Valley remains a landscape without a coherent geographical and programmatic identity. It is a challenging and complex territory full of history, meanings, and latent potentials. Although the area still functions as an industrial area while serving as an open yet fragmented public space, it remains a neglected place of pollution, urban decay, and social marginalisation. The site comprises former and contemporary industrial uses, non-sites, border regions, creeks and canals, council housing, art studios, parks, wilderness, pedestrian paths and overpasses. Its sectional and programmatic complexity, hydrological temporality, fragmentation, pedestrian impermeability, and economic disparity are fascinating and overwhelming. This post-industrial yet still partly productive wedge of land represents the missing link in an extensive system of open spaces between the Olympic Park site and the river Thames.

In this multifaceted territory, several themes become apparent, such as the lingering aftermath of the city's Olympic event, the rapid pace of capitalist speculation, the juxtaposition of decaying and emerging infrastructures, and the resulting sociological and economic pressures. However, the coexistence of old and new elements, along with the area's temporal and ambiguous character, contributes to a unique and compelling urban atmosphere. The abandoned industrial sites along the canals depict an enormous urban quality while standing in stark contrast to the cramped conditions of Central London. The Lower Lea Valley represents one of the last resources of large public spaces in London and one of the few potential common grounds of the city. A broad public should share its access and ownership, collectively engaging and investing in its future. The opportunity to create a programmatically open, ecologically diverse, and socially just neighbourhood

where urban production, living, leisure, and nature coexist should not be missed out. One particular node, where flows, systems and historical layers overlap, is the Abbey Mills Pumping station ground.

Located in Stratford, East London, the Abbey Mills Pumping Station has a rich and varied history. Originally constructed in 1868 the station is a product of the ingenious minds of engineer Joseph Bazalgette, Edmund Cooper, and architect Charles Driver, a testament to the ingenuity of its era. Over time, the site has evolved and adapted, reflecting the changing needs and desires of the city. Interestingly, the Abbey Mills site, from which the pumping station derives its name, holds significant historical resonance. The pumping station was built at the site of an earlier watermill owned by the former Stratford Langthorne Abbey. The abbey was dissolved in 1538 and since then the site has steadily mutated into its current shape. By 1840, the North Woolwich railway punctuated the landscape, marking the onset of industrial activity, ultimately culminating in the construction of the sewage pumping stations. In the time after, the area surrounding Abbey Mills underwent significant industrialisation, and the pumping station became a critical component of the city's infrastructure. However, as London entered the post-industrial era, the need for such facilities diminished, and the area around Abbey Mills began to decline. The transition from an industrial powerhouse to an urban void created opportunities for new and innovative uses of the space. The Abbey Mills site is now at the forefront of discussions surrounding urban regeneration, as it represents a confluence of historical, environmental, and social factors. The pumping station grounds have the potential to become a hub for sustainable urban development, offering a unique opportunity to integrate historical preservation with innovative design, environmental conservation, and community engagement.

As London continues to evolve, the Abbey Mills site presents a rare opportunity to create a harmonious balance between the city's industrial past, its present needs, and its future aspirations. By engaging with the complex layers of Abbey Mills' history and considering the diverse desires, patterns, and flows of the surrounding area, urban planners, architects, and stakeholders have the chance to shape the site into a model of sustainable urban development.





As the northern gate to Lea Valley, the King George's Reservoir shines as a striking example of urban ecology at work. Once a storage hub for London's water, it has morphed into a sanctuary for biodiversity, where the migrating birds scatter the landscape with life, painting a stark contrast against the grey backdrop of the city. An emblematic beacon amidst urban sprawl, the reservoir serves as a poignant reminder of nature's resilience in the face of man-made infrastructures.



Southwards, the Edmonton Solid Waste Incineration Plant stands as a testament to the delicate balance between infrastructure and nature. The plant, with its towering chimneys, contributes to sustainability by turning waste into energy, whilst being a significant part of the local economy. Its imposing presence amid patches of green serves as a powerful symbol of London's endeavors to maintain a symbiosis between urban growth and environmental stewardship.



Further south, the vibrant community of Tottenham throbs with palpable energy. Its streets, lined with a mosaic of local businesses, offer a dizzying variety of cuisines, crafts, and stories that hint at a rich tapestry of multicultural influences. Nestled amongst this buzz, the grand Victorian-era architecture stands as a silent testament to the social-economic transformations that have carved out this unique district over the decades.



Our journey down the river leads us to the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. Once a stronghold of industry, it has undergone a remarkable metamorphosis into a symbol of urban regeneration and sustainability. With state-of-the-art sports facilities nestled amidst biodiverse parklands, it offers a harmonious blend of recreational opportunities and environmental stewardship, weaving a rich urban tapestry where human activity and natural ecology coexist.



The Lower Lea Valley, an area rich in contrasts and complexity, is a riveting illustration of the intertwining layers of urban life. Here, the juxtaposition of industry and greenery, social transformation, and evolving urban landscapes, form a captivating palimpsest of historical and contemporary London. As we move further south, this urban tapestry gives way to the broader waterway system. Here, the River Lea gracefully merges with the Thames, carrying the stories of the Valley into a larger narrative. The individual streams of history, ecology, industry, and culture join the global flows of the Thames, symbolising the Valley's intricate role in the network of global exchanges. This convergence at the mouth of the Thames encapsulates the Lower Lea Valley's dynamic journey, a microcosm of urban evolution within the wider ecosystem of the planet.

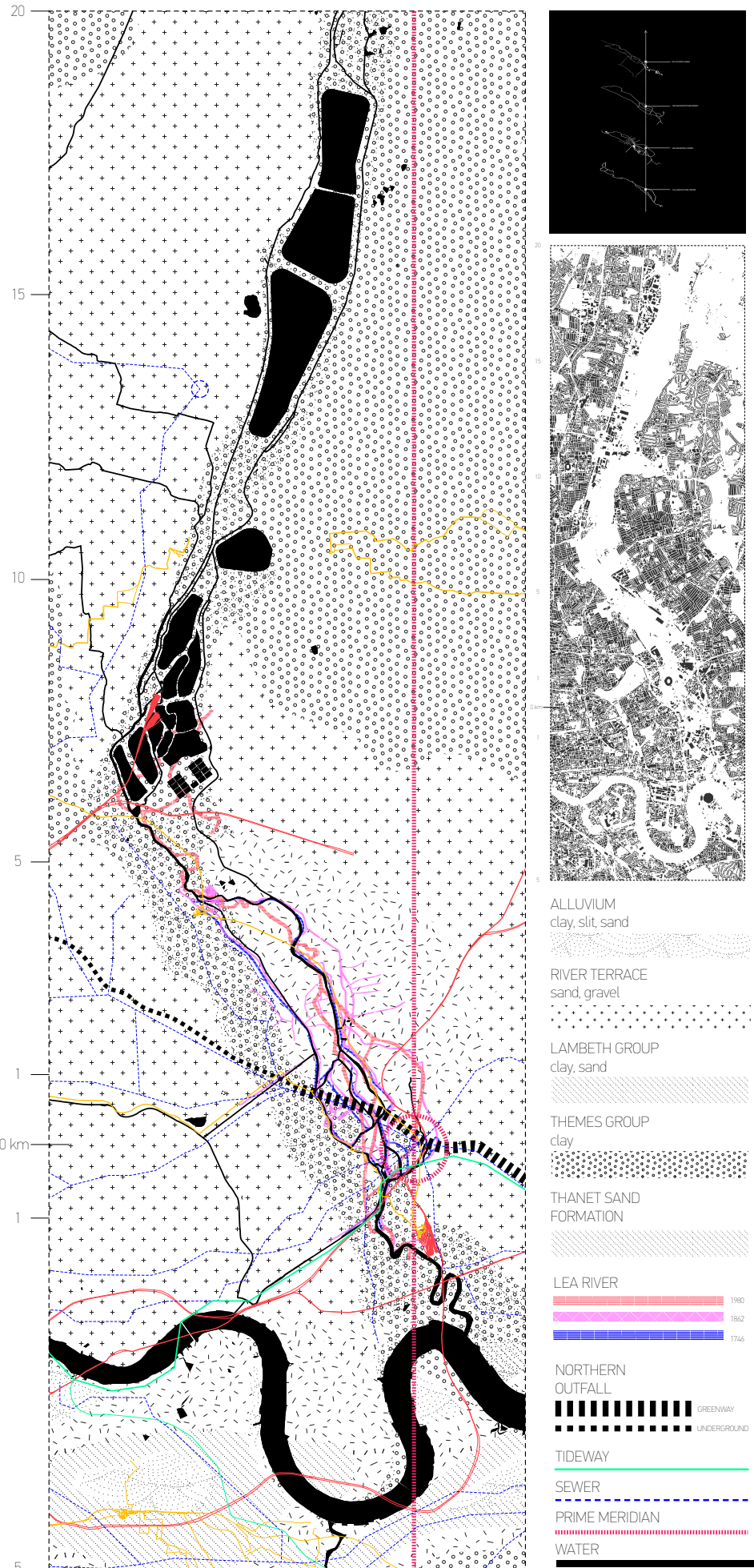


fig.13 The Lea Valley as a system of ecological, industria and social flows

# Territorial turn: Reading, rewriting, deleting

*"The city is a poem, a text with layers of meaning that we read and reread, searching for the secret life that pulses beneath its surface."*

*Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life*

Through the exploration of the potential of urban fallowing the goal of the research is to recognise the importance of the inherent complexity and systemic relationships within abandoned, disused, and marginalized urban spaces. In the context of the architectural discipline, this necessitates reevaluating of the traditional planning approaches, transcending the object-oriented toolset that has been conventionally employed. In order to address the intricate interdependencies between individual fragments and the larger urban fabric, architects and planners must adopt operational tools that enable them to decipher the multifaceted nature of these spaces. Consequently, these spaces may encompass multiple cultural landscapes, interwoven within a single location and characterized by intersecting boundaries, heterogeneous usage and occupancy patterns, and a wide array of identities. In this context, the concept of the palimpsest becomes particularly relevant,

as it acknowledges the non-linear historical stratification of urban spaces and the continuous layering of cultural elements over time.

In the early 1980s, André Corboz discursively declared the onset of a new paradigm for understanding cities and territories by describing the territory as the result of slow and long-term processes involving multiple transformations. Defined as a product and a project, the land requires a new attentive reading that considers the long history of places and the ensemble of signs, traces, and voids that is so tangible but ignored by the paradigm of *tabula rasa*. Corboz provides the palimpsest metaphor to express this complication: A palimpsest is a two-dimensional writing board with a three-dimensional symbol matrix that, as a metaphor, provides for a contextual, four-dimensional perception of territory, depicting space in its temporal



history.<sup>24</sup> The concept of palimpsest emerges as a new methodological and conceptual tool to define the urge for a new “territorial turn.” This new perspective implies that we should no longer focus on the present land as a starting point for our studies but rather see it as an outcome of the sum of events and occurrences that happened in the past and have resulted in the present state. In the current resource and land scarcity state, we need to critically reconsider the urban approach from the past century and identify a new paradigm. Therefore, to understand the faults of the contemporary paradigm, we need to look at its origins.

In “A Thousand Years of Non-linear History” Manuel De Landa’s non-linear approach to history resonates with André Corboz’s notion of the palimpsest as a way of understanding the historical development of urban landscapes. De Landa and Corboz stress the importance of acknowledging the intricate and interconnected nature of historical processes and the influence of material conditions on the formation of human societies.<sup>25</sup> Assemblages, as defined by De Landa, are complex, dynamic systems that emerge from the interactions of various components, mirroring the way a palimpsest is formed through the overlaying of different historical layers. Both assemblage theory and the palimpsest concept emphasize the importance of considering the interactions and relationships between different system elements rather than viewing them in isolation. Including the pre-existing networks of usages, while at the same time responding to the needs of the people living in proximity, has the potential to generate a long-lasting and wide-spreading impact at macro, meso and micro scales.

From an architectural standpoint, the challenge lies in devising tangible strategies to integrate the ideas of urban following, palimpsests, and assemblages into the design and planning processes. This requires a deep understanding of the context and community needs and a creative approach to design that seamlessly integrates functional and aesthetic considerations. Achieving and maintaining this equilibrium can be a delicate and challenging endeavour; however, fostering patterns of coexistence and symbiosis among diverse communities can strengthen the essence of a place, ultimately contributing to a vibrant and resilient cultural landscape that enriches the urban experience. The new approach towards contemporary material culture would also require a new reading of how our buildings relate to their environment. Whether we speak about land, construction, elements, or material reuse, a pivotal moment becomes the distancing from uniformity. Bridging the gaps between old and new, private and public, closed and open, permanent and temporary, can lead to a more inclusive, sustainable, and economically viable built environment. The tabula rasa has to be suppressed so that hybrids and palimpsest can become the new *modus operandi*.

As a conceptual and analytical tool, hybridity is a complex and polysemantic notion ingrained in almost all disciplines. In the case of architecture, it could be read as a synthesis linking the separation of matter and function. It is an “in-between,” in constant flux, driven by critical reflection of the self and its environment. In their research, Aurora Per and Javier Mozas define the hybrid as conscious that unprogrammed situations are the keys to its future.<sup>26</sup> The unexpected, unpredictable, and intimate relationships encourage coexistence and mutual programmatic, material, and aesthetic infusion. Nowadays, in the context of the global world and the cross- and interdisciplinary approach, its anti-crystalline form and flexibility allow it to become a principal towards the goals of a more self-conscious, caring, and resilient future. The architecture of dualism, discontinuity, and critical care, installed within the continuity of time, can stand up against the anguished aggression of the technical reason.

Whether these layers are based on time, space, or the intangible, an urban city and its constant transformation embody a seemingly never-ending rewriting of the present. Accepting that neither the site nor the building is an object frozen in time, we could refocus our capacity to facilitate future mutations and modifications. Layering, collage, framework; the technical set of the architect has to expand itself and embrace time as an equal parameter to all other design tools. Now the challenge in front of designers and planners is how to generate dialogue between the layers. For that, the architect must be able to learn from others, from the archaeologist, ecologist, and urbanist. In the case of reused land, materials and structures, the challenge that often hinders further discussion is the object’s integrity. Therefore, new discourse must be opened to see these materials not as an obstacle but as a source of physical and narrative complexity.

Employing layered interventions aims to incorporate a variety of purposes, attracting a diverse set of actions to the site. By introducing these distinct yet meaningful additions, the expectation is that novel patterns of inhabitation will gradually emerge, fostering desire and value both within site and in the minds of its inhabitants. This process has the potential to initiate a transformative shift, the direction of which remains uncertain, ultimately contributing to the dynamic evolution and adaptation of the urban landscape. Every intervention has an inherent life span—some more discernible than others, but none aligned. As such, a shift in functions is expected to occur over time. The suggested functions or programs are individual yet harbour synergistic potential, allowing the activities of one to be shared, enriched, or employed by others. These dynamics will be shaped by time and usage. These initial programs might influence future transitions or branch off in novel directions. Given the unpredictability of these outcomes, the architectural proposals endeavour

25. De Landa, Manuel. *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History*. Zone Books, 1997.

26. Aurora Fernández Per and Javier Mozas, *Complex Buildings: Generators, Linkers, Mixers &#38; Storytellers* (Normal Books, 2016). 12



to embed flexibility, preparing for unforeseen future developments and fostering adaptability within the evolving urban landscape. Future alterations on the site will necessitate a fresh perspective or enhanced comprehension, achievable only through the subtle nature of the initial interventions and the community's incremental occupation and adoption of spaces. Adaptive reuse exists as a continuous process rather than a static end state, underscoring the importance of ongoing evolution and adaptation in urban landscape shaping.

The proposed strategy blends hierarchy and mesh-work components, intending to address various claims to a fallow landscape by providing each stakeholder with a fair opportunity to impact the regeneration process. This approach, centred around urban fallows, aims to initiate and oversee change while promoting stability within diversity without dictating specific outcomes. The strategy aspires to cultivate internal resilience and equilibrium over time by proposing enduring, flexible, and adaptable interventions. Simultaneously, it seeks to safeguard the formerly fallow landscape from being reduced to a mere tool of the larger environment it is a part of, preserving its unique characteristics and value within the evolving urban context.



fig.14 The site as a palimpsest

“The land, so heavily charged with traces and with past readings, seems very similar to a palimpsest.”

André Corboz, *The Land as a Palimpsest*, 1983.

# Conclusion: Ghosts, water and soil

*"In wildness is the preservation of the world."*

*Henry David Thoreau, Walking*

In light of continuously shifting demographics, socioeconomic shifts of power, resource scarcity, and rapid urbanisation, the architectural discipline faces tremendous challenges that must be addressed with greater urgency and care. Although in the last decade, there has been a growing awareness of the environmental consequences of the extractive and polluting material culture, to accelerate the shift towards a more caring, resilient, and self-sufficient future, architects must transcend the boundaries of their field and adopt a more holistic approach as part of cross-disciplinary collaboration. Spanning between the micro and the macro, the new way of thinking and making must draw from an expansive knowledge base and embrace a range of practical and theoretical models that offer the potential to bring about regenerative and mutually beneficial outcomes for all involved. In this sense, architecture should become much more than the construction of buildings; it has to become a tool that orchestrates harmonious relationships be-

tween people, the built environment, and the natural world.

Throughout this research, a potential for a more conscious architectural practice has been seen in revitalising and reintegrating abandoned, underutilised, and unoccupied areas in the urban fabric. Those areas have been translated as dynamic patches defined by a complex network of actors (human and non-human), programs, ecologies, and economies. The critical point under which this research operates is the recognition that urban regeneration and reintegration cannot be achieved through a single approach or solution. Instead, it requires a multifaceted strategy that considers each area's unique characteristics and needs. In the case of those marginalised urban spaces, the provisional definition of fallows is given, intertwining various dependencies beyond the traditional urban agenda. By doing that, the traditional negative attitude is substituted by a more positive tone. Therefore, the state

of hibernation is no longer seen as an unutilised potential of the city but rather as a potential social and ecological reserve. In the context of London, those spaces are primarily linked to industrial and capital-driven cycles of investment and disinvestment, resulting in an omnipresent phenomenon of various scales. However, along the Lea Valley, a prominent environmental, industrial, and social corridor in north-east London, those urban fallows appear as a unique example of a linked network. This system supports various activities, from leisure and recreation to sustainable agriculture and large-scale production.

After thorough quantitative and qualitative research, the Abbey Mills Pumping Station site, located in the lower part of the Lea Valley, appeared as a pivotal point, linking various types of space. Productive, industrial, leisure, cultural, and even religious flows and systems overlap at that specific site, highlighting it as a hinge through which a broader impact could be generated. Combining the fast and slow flows within and through the site creates an opportunity to explore new architectural, urban, and landscape cross-overs and typologies. Integrating various voices and using design as a soft power to mediate social justice, design can shift the pivotal point from producing autonomous objects to generating directed fields in which programmes, events, and activities can play themselves out.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, it is essential that architects explore different strategies to revolutionise the traditional methods of construction and material sourcing to create resilient and sustainable architecture that can foster progress and increase resilience in our built environment. The researched and proposed building model is based not on global logistical chains but rather on regional, hyper-localised networks that, by taking advantage of the natural environment and an expansive array of different materials and designs, offer an innovative way to combat the urban blight associated with cities in decline. It is an approach that does not obtain delight "here" at the price of harm caused "elsewhere."

Additionally, seeing the potential in the existing urban fabric should become a primary concern for designers and architects, who bear the potential to reverse the buildup and unintentional wrongdoing of previous generations and intentionally mitigate climate and social awareness. Therefore, urban fallows, symbolising the outcast element in the contemporary urban realm, must be seen as spaces with a potential for re-evaluation, re-appropriation and, ultimately - regeneration. Considering those mentioned above, a successful approach towards this regeneration can be achieved through collaborative efforts, interdisciplinary thinking, and innovative design strategies grounded in sustainability, adaptability, and community engagement. Joining, binding and completing urbanistic, programmatic and material elements into a heterogenous structure will answer how these marginalised areas can

become urban attractive, innovative, and resilient places.

Despite its utopian aspirations, the project leans towards a more pragmatic resolution, acknowledging the complexities of the contemporary urban condition. In navigating these challenges, the project's narrative is embedded in a broader socio-ecological context, engaging with the unfolding of time. By touching upon adaptive reuse, low-energy water management systems and biophilic soil remediation, the project seeks to establish a resilient and responsive framework for urban regeneration. This process aims to reposition the architect's role as a facilitator, mediator, and catalyst for change, working collaboratively with diverse stakeholders and communities to reimagine and reshape the built environment.

In conclusion, the transformative potential of architecture lies not only in the physical structures it creates but also in its ability to inspire new ways of thinking about the relationship between people, the built environment, and the natural world. By embracing a more holistic and interdisciplinary approach, architects can help to reimagine our cities and districts turning marginalised and underutilised spaces into thriving, resilient, and inclusive places that promote social and ecological well-being. As we look to the future, we must continue to challenge the boundaries of our discipline and explore new possibilities for collaboration, innovation, and sustainable growth. In doing so, we can help to shape a more equitable, resilient, and regenerative built environment that serves the needs of both current and future generations.

27. Stan Allen, *Points and Lines: Diagrams and Projects for the City* (Princeton Architectural Press, 1999). 52

# Reflection: Past, present, future

*"In wildness is the preservation of the world."*

*Henry David Thoreau, Walking*

From a young age, I have been surrounded by an urban landscape where the echoes of history, culture, socioeconomics, and geography are intricately woven together. This rich tapestry of interconnected elements has provoked my curiosity and fostered a growing fascination with the various visible and invisible layers that make up our living environment. Probably this is also the reason why I chose to study architecture; a discipline deeply entangled with all of the aspects of the living and nonliving. Throughout my bachelor studies, I was able to encounter multiple approaches to architecture. However, whether based on typology, material, climate condition, or just aesthetic preference, architecture for me was an object or a group of objects located in a particular context. This perception was steadily broken down through my journey at the TU Delft. Throughout the courses that I had in the first year of my master's studies, I was able to learn that architecture is way more. Seeing it as part of a vast and diverse network, architecture for me has become a synonym for the tangible ensemble of matter and energy. This awareness led me to select a graduation studio that was aligned with my desire to explore and appreciate the diverse elements that shape our environment. Therefore, by choosing Architectural Design Crossovers, and in particular the topic of the heterogenous city, I was able to immerse myself in

a multidisciplinary environment that delved deep into the complexities of urban systems and further expanded my knowledge of the multiscale understanding of the contemporary world.

As I embarked on my graduation project, I sought to research what happens to buildings after they are built. I was questioning when and where the architectural project begins and when and how it ends. Following the ideas of Stewart Brand and Christopher Alexander, my curiosity was captured by the idea of time as a medium, bridging the gap towards the perception of buildings as terrestrial events, processes, and artefacts. From then on a very "wild" journey began for me. Under the direct guidance of my design tutor, Alper Semih Alkan, my initial goal was to develop a more comprehensive and nuanced appreciation for the myriad components that contribute to the vibrancy and vitality of contemporary European cities and in particular the role of the architecture practice as a bridge between actors, scales and flows. Having the opportunity to explore thoroughly the case of London revealed to me how little I knew about the way contemporary metropolises operate. Additionally, it revealed to me that urbanism as a discipline is way more intriguing, complex and narrational, than what is usually thought in architectural schools. Therefore

I needed a specific lens through which to understand the mass and flows in, out and within the given system boundaries. Navigating through the ever-pulsating maze of London's architecture and urban planning, my research efforts converged organically, leading me towards the desire of a deeper understanding of the lifecycle of buildings. This was additionally confirmed by the "Landscape as Infrastructure" text by P. Belanger, where he mentions that with its multitude of backflows, overflows and reflows present within the urban areas, waste ecologies are seen as the best example for examining the systems of our cities. In my case and the context of the architectural practice, particularly relevant was the construction and demolition waste. Additionally, the concept of obsolescence, often seen as the final stage of this lifecycle, intrigued me, with its implications not only on a physical level but also socio-economically and environmentally. I investigated how structures adapt, transform, and eventually fade into obscurity, probing the boundaries of our societal norms around property and permanence.

This exploration prompted me to veer slightly off my initial course, influenced no doubt by my insatiable curiosity. My research in this phase, while perhaps unexpected, was undeniably enlightening. I discovered the vast and complex network of processes, actors, and systems linked to this overlooked aspect of the building lifecycle. I found that waste, much like obsolescence, carried profound implications that extended beyond the realm of the physical. Despite this unexpected foray into waste management, I found the experience broadened my perspective and deepened my understanding of the architectural discipline, imbuing it with greater nuance and complexity. Still, I felt somewhat adrift regarding my project, with a plethora of new ideas swirling around but no clear way to consolidate them. The topic of waste soon converged into the broader theme of resources, providing a unifying thread that allowed me to weave my insights together.

I have to say that another critical moment in my research was when I started to dig deeper into the relationship between the urban and the hinterland, fascinated by the intricate web of dependencies that exist between them. Although through the process this investigation didn't become part of my research thesis, I think the knowledge that I have accumulated in this regard is going to be defining in my later career decisions. Reflecting on the thoughts of people like Neil Brenner, Alan Berger and Pierre Belanger I unlocked my fascination about the relationship between architecture and the intra- and extra-urban resources in the context of the climate and social emergency that our world is facing. During my macroscale investigation, I discovered that the built environment has a significant impact on the natural environment, and vice versa. The way we design and construct our buildings, cities, and infrastructure can either exacerbate or mitigate climate change and

its consequences. Therefore, the most pivotal point for me was when departing from research about waste, I began to explore the topic of planetary well-being. Degrowth, carbon footprint, circular economy and so on were terms unfamiliar to me at that point. Although in my background as a student, I have thought about some of those aspects, it has always been almost intuitive and never with a systematic approach. As I delved into these concepts and their implications for urban environments, I realised the immense responsibility we hold as architects, urban planners, and policymakers in shaping the future of our cities and, ultimately, the health of our planet. I came to understand that our current growth-focused mindset is unsustainable and that we must shift our perspective to one that prioritises resource conservation and long-term resilience. This involves rethinking the future through the lens of the materials and conditions we already have at our disposal, rather than solely focusing on novel technologies and unbridled expansion.

With this renewed focus, I set out on a journey to investigate the undervalued potential of urban territory, while expanding my theoretical knowledge through the thoughts and research of Matthew Gandy, Gilles Clément and Cecilia Furlan.<sup>28</sup> The initial narrative around the urban area and its waste and resources, now also encapsulated the idea of land as a scarce resource. In particular what my further research focused on were the abandoned, neglected and underutilised areas in the urban realm. My new lens allowed me to see these spaces not as barren or useless, but as rich reservoirs of potential energy, resources, and opportunities. In my theoretical exploration, I first approached these spaces as 'wastelands', casting aside traditional notions of value and use. Gradually, I shifted towards the idea of 'urban fallow', proposing a new paradigm that recognised their dormant potential, waiting to be harnessed. The shift towards viewing these lands as 'urban fallow' represented a significant turning point in my research. The concept of 'fallow' traditionally denotes a strategic period of rest implemented in farming practices, a restorative pause that enhances the long-term productivity of the land. By borrowing this terminology, I highlighted the sustainable, cyclical processes embedded in these urban spaces, hinting at the optimism of future revitalisation and reinvention. Conversely, the term 'wasteland' often conjures negative connotations – images of neglect, abandonment, and despair. Such labels can do more than just paint a bleak picture; they can enforce a perception of sterility and worthlessness, a barrier to recognising potential. Moreover, the depiction of these spaces as 'wastelands' implies a finality that contradicts their inherent dynamism and resilience. They are far from static, sterile plots; rather, they embody a temporal fluidity, a promise of transition and transformation.

28. On the 30th of September 2022 I was able to attend a lecture by Cecilia Furlan organised by the Chair of Urban Architecture at the TU Delft. This is when I found that she was working as a researcher and tutor at the Urbanism faculty at the TU Delft. Some time later I had a very fascinating talk with her and some other members of the faculty on the topic of my thesis, which was followed by a suggestion from my side if she would become the research mentor of my graduation project. She accepted and I am wholeheartedly thankful for that will remember only with good all the discussions we had in the time after.



By framing these sites as 'urban fallow', I sought to challenge and reframe these preconceptions, recognising the inherent value within these dormant spaces. I proposed a more nuanced understanding, one that acknowledges the importance of temporal cycles and respects the inherent ecological and social potentials. In this view, 'fallow' does not mean forgotten or worthless. Instead, it represents a pause, a strategic rest period brimming with potential energy, ready to be harnessed and directed towards a more positive, sustainable future. It is a constructive pause, not an end; a step towards regeneration, not a testament to decay. Throughout my investigation, I became convinced that these overlooked spaces could play a significant role in a sustainable and resilient urban future. Whether it was through resource recovery, habitat creation, community building, or simply adding to the urban mosaic, these sites embodied the dynamism and complexity of the cities we inhabit. Just as I had discovered that architecture was more than just objects in a particular context, I now saw these urban fallows as integral parts of the urban ecosystem. Furthermore, I realised that by reactivating urban fallows, we can simultaneously address multiple challenges, such as food and water scarcity, climate change adaptation, and social cohesion.

In the next phases, I began to explore alternative models of urban development that prioritise responsible resource use, equitable access to essential services such as water and food, and the preservation of ecosystems and biodiversity. I delved into concepts such as urban agriculture, decentralised water management, and adaptive reuse of existing structures, all of which can contribute to more sustainable and resilient urban landscapes. Through this transformative process, I recognized the importance of embracing a new paradigm for architecture and urban planning—one that is rooted in an understanding of the finite nature of our planet's resources and the interconnectedness of all living systems. This realisation has solidified my commitment to advocating for and implementing innovative approaches to urban development that prioritise the well-being of both people and the environment, and which ensure the long-term viability of our cities in the face of unprecedented global challenges.

Thanks to the input from my research tutor, Cecilia Furlan, I also began exploring the notion of urban palimpsest as an analytical and design tool in the context of urban regeneration. This concept encompasses the various layers of physical, social, and economic structures that exist within cities, and how they interact and influence one another. As I investigated the topic, I came across several compelling examples of how different layers of a city's history, infrastructure, and social dynamics can contribute to its overall character and function. I was particularly drawn to how cities have evolved, with new layers being added to older ones, creating a rich tapestry of urban experience. The theories of palimpsest and non-linear history, also helped me to choose my site of narrower investigation and intervention. The Abbey Mills pumping station area as a spot in the city of London where a multitude of historical timelines overlap, represented simultaneously a pivotal point between nature and infrastructure, various social, ethical and religious groups.

This is when I began facing various difficulties one after the other, all consequences of my previous decisions. Although throughout my whole research so far I was having difficulties in translating those non-architectural approaches into the architectural narrative, I found it particularly difficult when it was time for the designing part. Architecture as a discipline, or at least the one I was thought to do before this moment, was a very rigid and ignorant practice. However, after my deep engagement with the topic of planetary and social well-being, I saw how in its operations the traditional approaches to architecture were establishing false walls between here and there; between the site of construction and the sites of excavation, production, logistics and disposal. Therefore I began questioning everything I had learned so far about designing. These jumps between learning and unlearning completely blocked my ability to think about design, because I was questioning every single line, decision and method. Therefore I was often catching myself rereading my whole project journal over and over again, searching for an answer on how to escape the vicious cycle. Thankfully, under the guidance of both of my mentors, I think step by step I was able to exit this self-conflicting situation, yet never fully successful.

The critical steps that helped me progress in my project were rereading my research question every day and thinking about how each of the decisions that I make can help in the regeneration of the site. And maybe the most successful approach for me was when I was letting my design habits flourish, followed by a long self-assessing critical session, when I would redo the decisions that didn't go along with my new understanding of the architectural practice. In terms of my overall approach, I intentionally chose to adopt an open-ended, exploratory mindset. This mindset enabled me to navigate the inevitable uncertainties and complexities that arose during the project. It also fostered a spirit of curiosity and discovery that was integral to the creative process. Importantly, I chose to work in a cyclic, iterative manner, allowing my understanding to deepen with each cycle of exploration, design, reflection, and revision. This iterative approach encouraged a continuous process of learning and unlearning, a way of working that was both challenging and rewarding.

When it comes to the methodology, working with maps, literature reviews, photo documentation, and other analogue and digital tools allowed me to simultaneously operate between the various scales, and therefore develop a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics that underpin urban fallows. This multifaceted approach enabled me to navigate the complex web of relationships that exist between these underutilised spaces and the broader urban, social, and environmental contexts in which they are situated. The usage of maps was instrumental in grasping the spatial relationships within and between urban fallows. Maps served as an invaluable tool for visualising and analysing data, enabling me to identify patterns and relationships that would have been difficult to discern otherwise. This was particularly relevant in my work with urban fallows, where the interplay of various physical, social, and environmental factors creates a complex and dynamic system. Complementing my usage

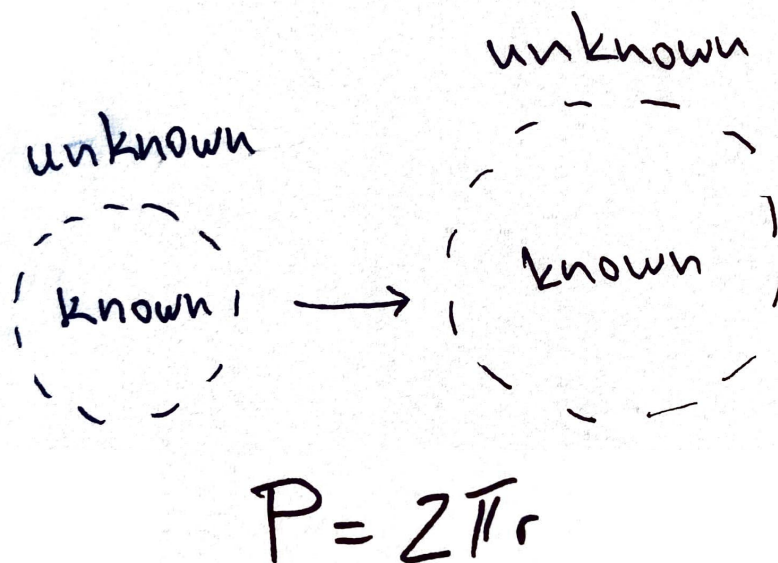


of maps was a deep dive into literature reviews. These reviews provided critical theoretical and historical perspectives that informed my understanding of urban fallows. Through examining a broad spectrum of scholarly works, I was able to draw upon a rich array of ideas, arguments, and findings that informed and shaped my approach. Photo documentation also played a vital role in my research. It provided me with a tangible record of the physical conditions and the character of these urban fallows. The photos not only served as a tool for personal reference but also helped to communicate the character and potential of these spaces to others.

The value of the transferability of my project lies in its ability to be applied to different urban contexts. The notion of 'urban fallows' and the strategies for their reactivation is not confined to any specific location. While the specifics of implementation would vary depending on the unique characteristics and needs of a given area, the overall approach can be adapted and implemented in cities worldwide. This project also provides a framework for further research and exploration. The concept of 'urban fallows' offers a fresh perspective and a new lens through which to examine urban landscapes, opening up numerous avenues for future investigation. For instance, more detailed studies could be undertaken to determine the best strategies for reactivating these spaces in different urban contexts, considering factors such as local climate, geography, cul-

tural and social aspects, or policy environment. Furthermore, the knowledge and insights gained from this project can be transferred to my future professional practice. As an architect, the understanding of architecture as a tangible ensemble of matter and energy – an interconnected part of broader ecological, social, and economic systems – will profoundly shape my approach to design and planning. The emphasis on long-term sustainability and resilience, coupled with the acknowledgement of the finite nature of our planet's resources, will guide my decision-making process, ensuring that my future projects align with the principles of responsible and sustainable design.

Ultimately, my graduation project served not only as a capstone to my academic journey but also as a springboard for my continued exploration of the fascinating intricacies of urban life. This transformation in my perception and understanding of architecture and urban systems has not been a linear process. It has been a journey marked by twists and turns, filled with unexpected discoveries and challenging questions. Yet, it is precisely these experiences that have deepened my appreciation for the complex, multi-layered, and ever-evolving nature of cities. As I look ahead, I am filled with excitement and anticipation for the ongoing exploration and the potential for further cross-over, always open to the unexpected, in my pursuit to understand the tangible ensemble of matter and energy we call architecture.



*Every piece of knowledge we acquire is like a ripple spreading across the surface of a vast, uncharted sea, expanding our circle of understanding. With each ripple, the boundary where the known meets the unknown extends, sparking a dance of exhilaration and anxiety, curiosity and trepidation. Yet, it is in this delicate dance, at the very edge of our wisdom, where we find our deepest insights and awaken our most profound curiosities. So embrace this journey, for the beauty of knowledge is not just in its possession, but also in the pursuit, the constant touching of the great unknown.*

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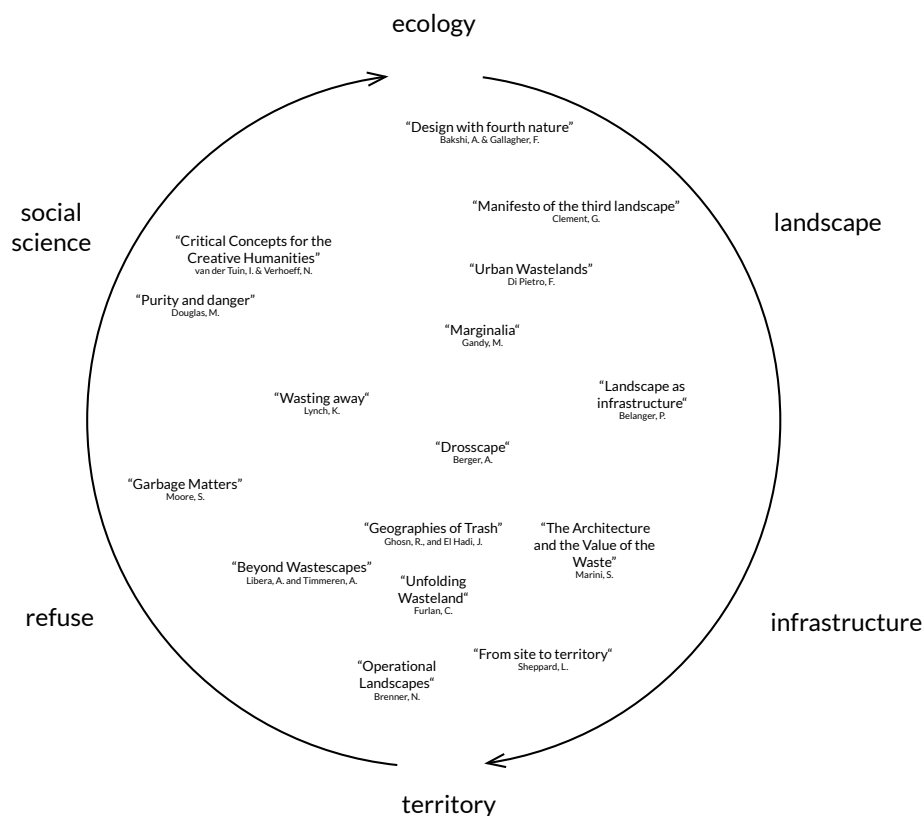


fig.15 The cross-disciplinary framework of the research

# URBAN FALLOWS

*ventsislav kartselin*

In the face of rapid urbanisation, population growth, and environmental degradation, there is an urgent need to rethink how urban spaces are designed and built. This study investigates the potential of architecture as a catalyst for the regeneration of marginalised urban land for a more socially progressive and resilient future for cities. The regeneration process is viewed in symbolic terms through the lens of cyclical agricultural fallowing as a method of urban renewal. This perspective reflects on the dormitory state of the site in a positive manner, seeing the temporarily halted capitalistic activities as an opportunity for other ecosystems to thrive. Drawing from cultural landscape theory, incorporating the idea of architecture as an accelerator in urban ecosystems, and ending with the notion of “the incomplete”, the thesis suggests a framework for progressive change and the eventual occupation of the post-industrial site of Abbey Mills Pumping Station over time. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research aims to uncover the potential and challenges of urban transformation as part of a more conscious architectural practice.

**Keyword:** transformation, fallow, palimpsest, scarcity, diversity